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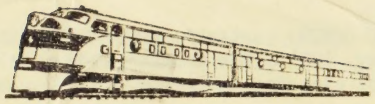
RAIL TRAVEL



Vol. 2 No. 4
February 21, 1972
newsletter
#30

Express Ads

RAILROADIANA: Steam and Electric public timetables, North Shore Line Annual Reports 1917 to 1948, traction timetable reproductions. Send 20¢ for Catalog # 6. Herb Danneman, 14425 Woodland Pl., Brookfield, WI 53005

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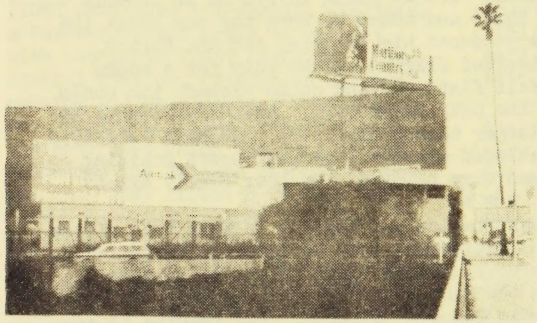
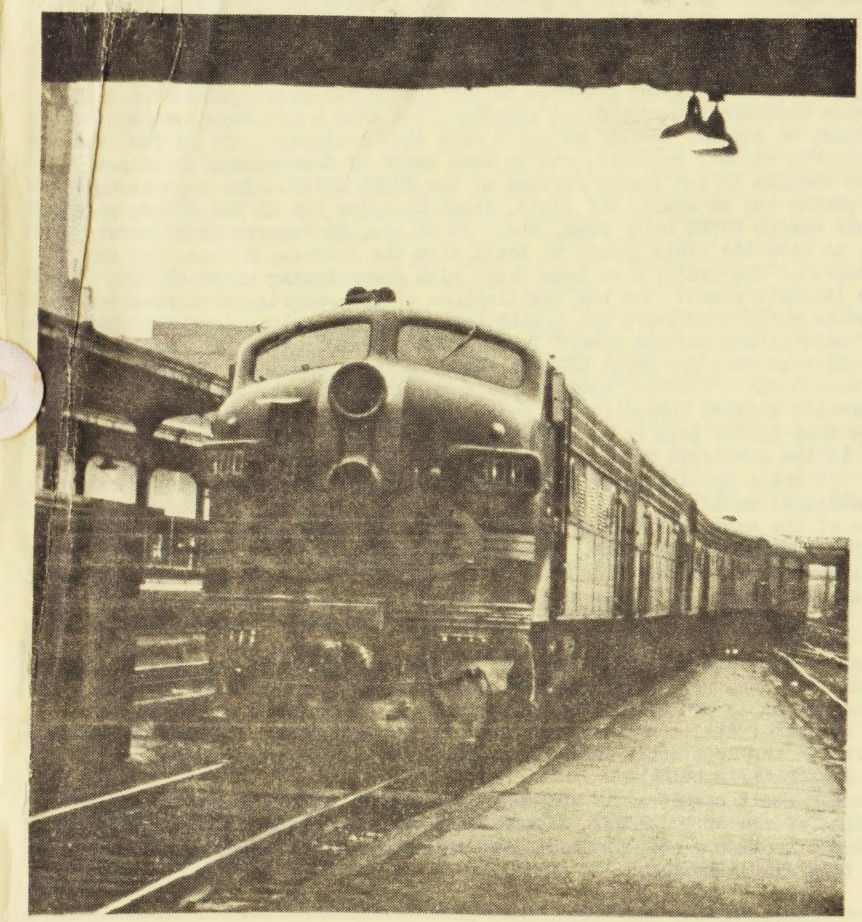


In Hollywood: an Amtrak billboard advertises the Los Angeles to Las Vegas "Fun Train." Photo by Paul Rayton.

BACK ISSUES of RTN are available at 25¢ each. We must ask you to order back issues separately; we cannot back-date subscriptions due to the clerical expense. All 29 back issues are available with these exceptions: 7 thru 10, 13 thru 15, 21. If out of an issue, we will credit your subscription with an extra issue (if you are a current subscriber) unless you indicate otherwise. Order from Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley, Calif. 94709. Back issues are sent by third class mail.

ANNOUNCEMENT TO SUBSCRIBERS: Reluctantly, we must raise the subscription rate of RTN. Effective March 15 the yearly rate will be $6.00. This increase will enable us to continue sending the newsletter by first class mail and to continue and improve the features readers have told us they want. Our reader survey of last December indicated overwhelmingly that respondents preferred this course of action. By lifting our rate--as the Wall Street Journal would put it--we will be able to break even and continue to bring you RTN as you like it.



Super Chief

ON THE COVER: Amtrak's SUPER CHIEF/EL CAPITAN at Chicago Union Station in October, 1971. The usually-on-time train on this occasion is being pulled out for cleaning and refueling after an hour-late arrival.

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SPECIAL REPORT ON INDIANA TRAINS

The National Association of Railroad Passengers issued Feb. 23 a letter to members in Indiana apprising them of the bleak outlook for rail service in that state after mid-1973, when Amtrak can drop unprofitable runs. "The only Amtrak train running thru Indiana whose revenues have covered more than 50% of expenses during any one month of operation is the BROADWAY LIMITED" reported NARP. Indiana members were urged to interest local opinion leaders in stirring up private and public sources of funds to conduct studies of rail service in the state. NARP can be contacted at 417 New Jersey Ave., S.E., Washington D.C. 20003 (phone 202-546-1550).

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"I don't believe anybody can say, 'We are going to end railroad passenger service.' I think that it's essential to some people and in some places. As just another citizen trying to decide what people really want, it's my feeling that if we can immediately reverse the downward trend in ridership --as we have done to some extent so far--and if we can show improvements in a large part of the system before long, the public and the Congress will support us."

—Roger Lewis, U.S. News & World Report, 2/28

"I have been trying since Amtrak's latest schedule revision last November to obtain a system-wide timetable of train operations. Few are available in stations, and the ones which are available contain dozens of errors... A written request directly to Amtrak in Washington for an error-free, correct timetable on which I can rely in travel planning has met with no response. As much maligned as the pre-Amtrak passenger carriers may have been, they at least had the competence to know when their trains ran."

--letter to Wall Street Journal, 2/14

"When we finally arrived in San Diego, five hours late, it was almost 3 in the morning. The boy who had never before ridden on a train, now had, certainly, and we wanted him to do something else he never had done before. He never stood downtown and watched the sun come up."

--Lew Scarr, San Diego Union, 1/30

LETTERS

We are pleased that RTN (Feb. 7 issue) arrived here Saturday the 19th rather than the following Tuesday (no mail delivery on the Monday holiday). My wife theorized, "Perhaps he's had a relapse from his bout with the flu." I was beginning to classify your newsletter in the same category as SP trains..."running late."

A. E. Hogben

Los Angeles, Calif.

(Score another hit for woman's intuition!)

Hutchinson finally got new timetables in February. We had July 12 issues until the Jan. 16 schedule came out! Also Emporia and possibly Newton had the same problem. I saw my first Nov. 14 schedule in Denver.

I've been at the depot here during the holidays and have some idea of all the passengers Amtrak lost because they didn't have accommodations. Why didn't they run a second section? Also, why did they take the 4-4-2 sleeper off the SUPER CHIEF? The men at the station say the Amtrak computer is fouled up--for instance, a group traveling from Chicago to Kansas City: the computer would show that space taken all the way out. Also, cancellations were a problem.

John Arbuckle

Hutchinson, Kansas

The new POTOMAC TURBO schedule isn't too much to be proud of. My Sept. 1948 Official Guide shows a schedule for the steam-powered CINCINNATIAN on the same route that is 3 minutes faster than the new westbound TURBO. If a steam-powered, heavyweight-car train could make this run in 7hrs 43mins in 1948, surely the TURBO can improve on this.

John A. Mills

Little Rock, Ark.

RAIL TRAVELER'S DIARY

with: **Paul Rayton**

Welcome aboard the

SUPER CHIEF

Date: September 5, 1970

I've had an affair the last several years, an affair that has been both rewarding and frustrating. The SUPER CHIEF has been my enamorata, and writing about the SUPER CHIEF is like writing intimate memoirs about your lover. You love her, you know her from top to toe, you know her special beauties, so well in fact that you see the little defects, too, and they bother, somehow more than if you didn't know her so intimately.

Scholars of the rails may argue and debate, but to this writer there is only one train in the country that lived up to its reputation and consistently excelled in every aspect of its operation--the SUPER CHIEF.

My lover is changing now, in 1972, aging more rapidly than I would have wished. It's almost as if her hair were greying at an unnatural rate, and bit by bit being rendered a little less attractive. The old magnetism still works, though, and for a while longer I'll still be able to rely on her.

This trip on the SUPER started on a hot day in Chicago. We were returning to Los Angeles and as we entered Dearborn Station a large, illuminated sign hailed us: "SUPER CHIEF passengers check in here." We presented our tickets and turned to look over the crowd of people already waiting for boarding to begin. The amicable agent returned our ticket receipts to us and indicated that the train would be ready for boarding shortly. Thanks to this check-in counter, we wouldn't have to bother with our tickets again during the trip.

We were due to leave Chicago at 6:30pm, and at 6pm doors marked SUPER CHIEF slid open and we sleeping car passengers began boarding.

We headed for car 175, bedroom G, our home for the next 2222 miles. The Porter intercepted us outside the car and insisted on carrying our bags to our room; he wouldn't hear of us doing it ourselves.

The extremely heavy load of summertime travelers had been apparent first by the large crowd in the station waiting room. The size of that crowd would have been impractical to carry except on one ungainly 30-car train. Therefore, we were now aboard a full-length train consisting of 7 sleeping cars, plus a lounge and dining car. Another train, made up entirely of coaches (plus lounge and diner) was on a neighboring track--the EL CAPITAN, destined also for Los Angeles, and due to follow about 10 minutes behind us all the way across the country. During "off season" operations, the two trains operated as one set of equipment only.

Precisely at 6:30 we began to pull out of the station. Emotional, frenzied waving of hands, and another trip had begun.

The first thing I wanted to check was the music--was it working? Closing the bedroom door (a microswitch shuts off the speaker in your bedroom when you open the door, to avoid disturbing a carload of passengers), I punched the buttons, "classical music," "popular music," and "radio program." Bingo! All three coming in loud and clear.

This was no time to fiddle around in the bedroom, though. We were leaving Chicago and there was sightseeing to do.

It's funny how, in this train, though fairly crowded, real traffic jams never developed. Somehow the dining car served people with a minimum of wait, and the dome seats were not monopolized for hours at a stretch. People sort of drifted, comfortably relaxed, from place to place, enjoying the tranquility of the ride.

More music piped into the dome. A peppy number beat in rhythm with the trees whipping by outside. As dusk settled deeper, we watched in a sort of reverie as the dark green leaves of the trees moved in fluid motions in air currents generated by the rush of the train. Soon it was time for dinner.

Riding on the SUPER CHIEF is similar to living in a luxury hotel. It is a luxury hotel, in most ways. Nothing is overlooked, and meals, in particular, are a celebration, a culmination of culinary arts coupled with matchless execution. The SUPER was a past master at these necessities. Meals were an integral part of the whole SUPER CHIEF experience, and to feast on one meal was to experience the desire for many more.

Our plan of action (in order not to gain more than 15 lbs during the trip—especially in the face of all the temptation) was something like this: Eat dinner tonight. Tomorrow, sleep late and skip breakfast, eat lunch early, and then have the Champagne Dinner in the evening (after late afternoon hors d'oeuvres). Breakfast without fail just before detraining in Los Angeles. Every meal was to be savored, to be a memorable experience of its own. Hence our effort not to go overboard.

From the moment you entered the dining car you were aware that this was something special. Every table had a fresh, long stem yellow rose. Each one bobbed slightly as the car responded to track irregularities, beckoning to us, "Come, sit at my table."

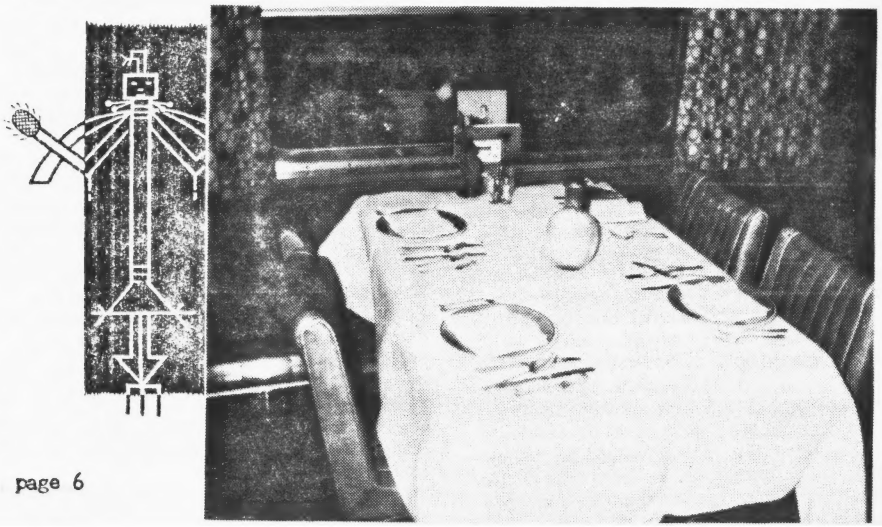
We were guided to a table for two by the Maitre d'. (Technically he is a Steward, but that label in a setting like this seems inappropriate.) Here again the special customizing of the Santa Fe becomes apparent: the tables are larger along one side of the car, seating the usual four persons, but with more than average table space for each. (Table width 49ins, vs standard 41ins.) Along the other side of the car smaller tables (30ins) for two. Again, above average table space--and a wider central aisle for the waiters. The best of all possible worlds.

All tables were immaculately set with Irish linen and silverware, gleaming and singing--literally--with the motion of the train.

As I wrote our dinner order, I couldn't resist a rather giddy feeling at the smoothness of the roadbed. We had been on the Penn Central the night before, and the comparison between the two couldn't have been more dramatic. It was enough to make an Eastern traveler weep.

Prices for the dinners were not exactly the most reasonable in the world, but considering what you get I feel they were equitable, especially considering the level of service offered (six waiters for 36 seats, not counting 10 seats in the Turquoise Room).

If only they weren't so generous! I ordered a Charcoal Broiled Salmon Steak, Maitre d'Hotel. This ($4.85) included, in addition to a sizable entree serving, celery and olives; an appetizer (choose from 6, including shrimp cocktail); salad; two vegetables (choose from 4); rolls; dessert (choose from 7); and beverage. If you wanted extras or "seconds" you simply asked, and it was on the way. (You had to exercise caution in this respect, too... One breakfast time I was sort of cogitating aloud on the desirability of another muffin, when a waiter happened by and heard my mumbling. His instant response was, "You want some more muffins?" Before I could reply, he disappeared into the kitchen and momentarily appeared with another plate of muffins for me. I was thankful I hadn't spoken a word like "breakfast"!)



It is our aim to make the Super Chief a train you'll always remember, providing the type of service you'll never forget.

What can you say in the face of such excellence? The facet of the SUPER CHIEF that first impressed me—at our very first meeting--was that the chef in the kitchen cooked the dinners precisely as requested. No "take it or leave it" entree here. Every serving was given the individual attention that is only expended by a man who takes certain pride in his job and is sincerely devoted to doing his part in maintaining an outstanding entity.

Attention had been paid to the proper preparation of the vegetables, too. Even the stewed tomatoes had a flair of originality--bread crumbs and Parmesan cheese lightly baked over the top. No hash-house this.

After dinner we talked for a time with the Maitre d', who told us that the chef with this crew was one of the best. This chef, we were told, made the best Bearnaise Sauce in the system, with his own super special recipe. The chefs make all the various sauces for the many dishes on the SUPER CHIEF. It's another element of their pride.

Nighttime is perhaps the best time on the SUPER CHIEF. Up in the "Pleasure Dome" (their appellation) you sit in huge, overstuffed, swiveling easychairs--the only movable dome seats in the country, and positively the finest. The lights are all extinguished, save tiny red lamps marking the aisle. Soft music fills the carpeted silence of the dome, conversations are low, the temptation is to hold hands with any loved one with you.

Passing outside the windows, nearby lights illuminated yards of occasional farms. Other lights were merely illuminated telephone poles out in the middle of nowhere, lighting up a patch of ground. And many lights shone in the distance, like clusters of stars; but these "stars" I knew to be indications of nearby civilization. Their bluish glare was eerie across the plains. A glance upwards, thru the broad, flat-paned window above me, revealed the summer sky in all its glory. No moon tonight, but stars--real, this time--in profusion.

I stood for a while in the vestibule, too, taking in the air and the smells of the Kansas flatlands --and I was thankful that we were somewhat isolated from the pungent farms...

And nighttime is the most evocative in your sleeping car bedroom, too. With all the lights out (or maybe with just one of the blue lights that magically appear when you flip the light switches the other direction), you lie there, sharing a view of towns, trees, farms and night that can only be described as special--an experience so poignant by nature that the motion of the train only adds to the ethereal sense of things. You glide quickly thru dozing little towns, pause occasionally in villages and cities—their names always to remain a mystery--and then move on, on to more sleepy towns. These are the towns that make up the whole interior of the country. This is America, the America nobody remembers. The America of trees, and general stores, and dirt roads, and quilted farms. The forgotten America—the America which, as far as the chic snobs of the cities at either end are concerned, exists solely to keep NY and LA separated by 3000 empty miles.

Night riding is enough to rekindle the patriot in you. If only more people would ride trains and take the time (and the reflective thoughtpower) to look out the window before they retire for the night—maybe the attainment of a united country might seem more within grasp.

We were there, together, saying nothing, but thinking similar thoughts.

* * *

Late to bed—late to rise. The night before, at dinner, a slip of paper tucked into the menu had asked us when we wanted our "Wake-up Cup" of coffee brought to our door. My wife's coffee arrived on schedule at 9am. On a whim, I had requested tea, though the paper had only suggested coffee. Tea, too, was delivered.

We lounged around our room for a spell. Pajama-clad, I lay in bed and, during a station stop, watched the townspeople of Trinidad, Colo., scurry about their day. Many looked tense, drawn, nervous. What they needed was a trip on the SUPER CHIEF!

Then it was time to get up, to watch the ascent of Raton Pass. Looking out the rearmost car, Sangre de Cristo Mountains loomed large and snow-crested, while immediately below I saw our track, twisting and writhing along the mountain grade toward the crest of the pass.

Raton tunnel, and down the other side—and it was soon time for lunch. You'll recall our intention to eat a fairly light lunch, in order to have room for the huge dinner? We sat down in the dining car and peered at the menu.

"That tureen of soup looks real good!"

"Yes, and how about that coupe of fresh fruit, au Kirsch?"

"And I would sure like to sample some of their preparation of the Salisbury Steak!"

The tureen of soup

We could hardly stop ordering, but the lunch was, once again, tasty beyond our expectations and exceedingly well worth the extra calories.

Our luncheon started out with the tureen of soup, an unforgettable event. A huge silver bowl of soup was set on the table, with a curving ladle for serving purposes. The waiter apportioned one serving each, then left us to enjoy our first course. The soup was green pea and customized with croutons and bits of ham. It was thick and creamy, and made even better by the special large soup bowl.

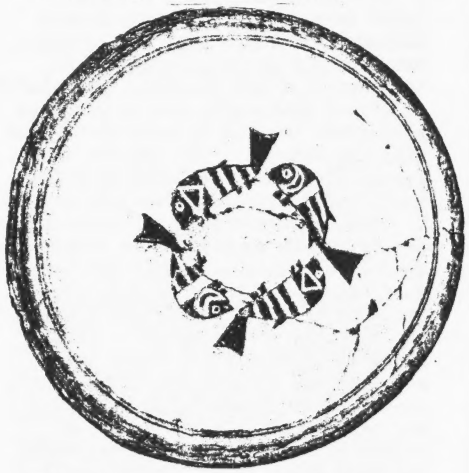
The balance of the luncheon was, as you would by now expect, prepared par excellence, and we went away much fuller than we had planned to be at that time of the day...

Lunch time is one of my favorite dining car periods. The natural sunlight streams in the windows, making brilliant sparkles through water and wine. Yet the light is at a direct-enough angle that it offends few people by shining directly in their eyes. Thus, the shades on the windows can be kept up and the viewing is optimum.

New Mexico at lunchtime is simply scrumptious. During our luncheon, rolling brown hills with occasional cows were in evidence. And some vast plains. For a spell there were small gullies cut into jagged red rock by now-vanished rivulets. Now and then an Indian settlement.

The Santa Fe traded heavily upon its southwestern-Indian heritage in the operations of its passenger trains. Thus the colorful train names like the GRAND CANYON and the various CHIEFS, and on thru the general motif of the entire system. The little Indian boy, known as Chico, was a familiar figure on many Santa Fe articles, including cocktail napkins. The unusual "Kachina Room" (in the EL CAPITAN) is another Indian tradition. Imaginative figurines of southwestern Indian cultures were thematic in many places in all these trains.

This Indian salutation manifested its ultimate expression in the chinaware of the SUPER CHIEF. A massive set of pottery was stocked on this train, was stocked on this train, a differently configured and decorated dish for almost every course in the meal—and every one patterned after original pottery of the Mimbreno Indians, a culture existing in New Mexico about 900 A.D. They were the most-progressed of all the pre-Columbian Indian cultures, and these facsimiles used on the SUPER CHIEF are a beautiful and fitting tribute to the early inhabitants of the area. The pottery set is simply extraordinary. No other railroad in the country could show such an ethnic tribute or awareness.



Original Indian pottery: fish pattern

Repairs to the electrical system on one sleeping car back in Kansas City had put us about 45 mins late. By Las Vegas (N. Mex.) we had to wait for the timetable to catch up to us. That was another thing about the Santa Fe: they had the capability of making up minutes when events conspired against the actual timetable. And all the time utilizing a schedule that was not so ridiculously padded as many other lines of the era. We had gone 1204 miles so far—and were on schedule.

An almost-complete set of SUPER CHIEF china. Near the upper left of the photo is a plate bearing the fish pattern shown on page 9. All the various designs are authentic Indian patterns.

During the afternoon the SUPER CHIEF headed further south, toward Albuquerque. This part of the trip, crossing New Mexico, is always a high point of the journey. The natural colors of New Mexico are so pure, so saturated, that it is hard to believe they are natural. The sky was the purest blue, and the earth so brilliantly red it looked undeniably painted.

This is desert country, technically. Vegetation is mostly low in height and sparse, but it's certainly not the arid extreme of Death Valley. The funny thing about the desert lands here is that they are deceptively flat. Where it appears flat, there are actually big valleys and steep grades --and the train must cope with each and every one. So, here in the "flat" desert there are surprisingly long and sharp turns, and we spent a lot of time curving along trending southward.

I spent much time this afternoon watching patterns of light as the rays of the sun shifted from one side of the train to the other. As it streamed in our window, we were treated to a panoply of geometry as the sun lit the rug on our floor. Then, minutes later after another wide, circling turn, it could come in from the other side of the train, thru the hallway and our open bedroom door. And when we weren't watching this, there was plenty of action outside the windows--in the mountains, the canyons, the trees, the clouds.

There was action in the lounge car, too. Here was one of the best-run lounges in the country, probably again the best. Ample current magazines were placed aboard, in special SUPER CHIEF leather binders. Current issues of Life, Newsweek, Holiday, and several others, not to mention the most recent issue of the Official Guide of the Railways. Also at several stops en route, the latest newspapers were placed aboard, stamped "Compliments of the Santa Fe," and placed in the lounge area.

A well-stocked writing desk was supplied with SUPER CHIEF stationery, and several promotional color postcards of the train. In the lounge and in every sleeping car were also train timetables/route guides, with notes of sightseeing or historical interest about places along the way. The "timetable" also served to introduce to first-timers the services of the train. Another "welcome aboard" feature of this train.

At Albuquerque, the train brochure suggested everybody get off and stretch their legs. An idea well taken. While standing outside we were treated to a first-hand view of the train, our SUPER CHIEF, taking a bath. A washing device ran up and down the length of the train, cleaning the sides and the windows. Once again she stood glistening in the hot sunlight. We would have a new lease on life for the rest of the trip--and clean windows for the flaming sunsets of the desert.

While standing there, once again the coach section of the train caught up with us, as it had several times earlier during other refueling stops. We almost were playing tag across the desert!

5:10pm. "All aboard," came the call, and each Porter down the length of the train repeated it. We boarded, ready to leave. It had been about 96° outside, and 10 minutes was plenty!

Santa Fe

The next treat of the trip was in the lounge beneath the dome--the hors d'oeuvres. Freshly made by the chef in the dining car, this specialité de la maison was again one of the many ways in which the Santa Fe went out to please the people who rode this most effulgent of trains. A big plate was loaded with paté snacks, and sardines and anchovies on small bread squares. Nuts and cheese crackers were in separate side dishes. We had tall, cool vodka collins upon which to sip, and sat alternately in the lounge and the dome, watching the sun sink lower and lower in the sky--painting the rocks of the desert with shifting tones and myriad imaginative shapes.

Darkness began to overwhelm the light, and it was soon time for our dinner. Tonight's menu was completely different from that of the previous evening. The Tournedos of Prime Tenderloin of Beef, with the famous Sauce Bearnaise, sounded really mouth-watering, but tonight Peggy and I were going to celebrate.

The Champagne Dinner sells for $7.90 per person. If you initially balk at the seeming high price, permit me to say that nowhere--even on the ground--will you get a feast like this, at this price. The price includes a "split" of champagne per person; with two eating you are entitled to a half bottle.

Each course is prepared with care, spiced with precision, cooked to individual order, and served on the beautiful pottery. And of course the champagne is brought to your table in a shining silver ice bucket.

It is safe to say that this meal is the best gourmet experience offered on the rails today. The service here surpasses that of most bona fide restaurants, and the meal itself is enough to overwhelm even the most ravenous of appetites.

Celery Hearts and Colossal Green Olives

Shrimp Cocktail

Consomme, Hot or Jellied or Soup du Jour

For the Steak Connoisseur

16-ounce New York

STRIP SIRLOIN STEAK

Carefully aged for your dining pleasure
Broiled over charcoal to your liking with
Choice of golden french fried onion rings or
Fresh mushroom caps

Fresh Vegetables in Season

Hasned Browned, Cottage Fried, French Fried or Au Gratin Potatoes

A Tossed, Crisp Green Salad with Cheese Cubes and Bacon Chips
with choice of French, 1000 Island or Lorenzo Dressing

Toasted Garlic or Cheese Rolls

Choice of Pastries, Sundaes, Fruits in Season or Cheeses

Coffee and After Dinner Mints

If Champagne Dinner is desired
with entree other than steak, the Steward
will be glad to make suggestions
and arrangements for you

During dinner I noticed that we were traveling at a high rate of speed, but not until I brought out my stopwatch and clocked us did I believe it: one mile in about 37½ seconds, or 95mph. This was no fluke, either, for it went on mile after mile in these now-flat desert lands. If I had a choice between this and some other train, even a Turbo or Metro, you'd find me here!

That night, with the stars above working their magic thru the dome windows, we got to talking with the bartender, a most agreeable fellow named Louis. He convinced us that we deserved another bottle of champagne--in our bedroom. So I left him our "address" and soon he showed up with bottle, ice bucket, glasses, even a box of cheese crackers. The rest of the evening was spent in a private celebration in bedroom G.

In the morning I removed my freshly-shined shoes from the shoe storage box. Ready (almost) for Los Angeles--there was one more

important meal, breakfast, with the famous Santa Fe French Toast. Its fame is so widespread that the recipe appears periodically in print. All I can say is, without fail, try it.

Breakfast time saw us slipping thru the various slurbs that surround Los Angeles. Not much more sightseeing (save for the Pasadena-Los Angeles stretch) now. Was it only yesterday that I saw all that clean air in New Mexico?

We pulled into Los Angeles Union Station at 8:50am, 10 minutes early. We had carried a load of about 135 people across the country, and for the two of us it was a trip to bring back happy memories in months and years to come.

Were there elements of the SUPER CHIEF I didn't like? Yes, I'll have to admit to that. Even my lover isn't perfect. The dining car—the lights were far too bright. Even the subdued lighting of the Turquoise Room (which was available free for private dining parties of six or more) was rather too high. Why didn't Santa Fe ever get together with Seaboard Coast Line and offer candlelight dinners? That would surely have been the touch to spark even more romances than already were started aboard the train.

And, in spite of my ravings about the food, from a strictly epicurean standpoint, I'd have to say that the BROADWAY LIMITED offered better Roast Prime Rib of Beef; likewise better was the hot consommé of the BROADWAY. Bear in mind, though, that this was a competition among giants, a judgment made on almost niggling distinctions. In the long run, both trains offered some of the best food in the country.

And in Albuquerque: when the train was washed, the device that does the washing doesn't quite hit the dome windows. Since the dome is the prime area for scenery viewing, why doesn't the man bring the machine back for a second pass, at a higher level, across the windows of the dome? His washer is adjustable to accomplish this feat.

Sometimes I've found certain crew members to be a little lackadaisical. It's very infrequent, but I have found some men to be rather careless. It reflects poorly on the whole, and it hurt deeply because I knew that they were unrepresentative of the majority of the crews.

The music system is highly commendable. No other railroad can hold a candle to the Santa Fe in this respect, either. All the fine equipment has been very well maintained for years. But--the system is really old; the machines that run the tapes occasionally develop a terrible waver, rendering the music unbearable. It is fortunate, then, that there are two channels, for the other channel is usually functional. The music selections should have more verve.

And finally, with a train of such distinction, why was no illuminated drumhead in service? It would seem a trifling expense for such a train as this.

But these final comments and suggestions are mere trifles. The SUPER CHIEF is a living testament to the joys, the sublime raptures of well-run rail passenger traveling. The SUPER CHIEF. The train supreme. The train.

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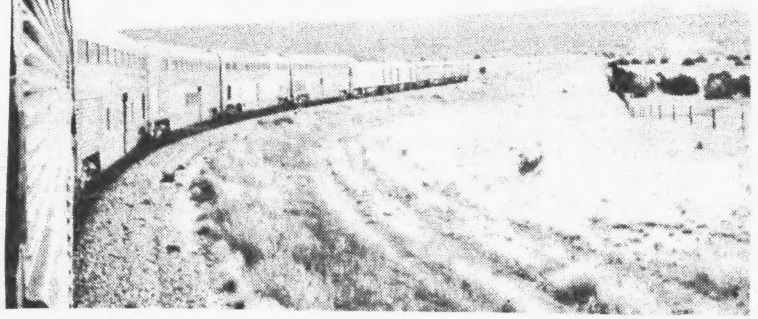
Super Chief

by Rich Tower & Jim Russell



The magic train, the SUPER CHIEF, was born on May 12, 1936, off and running with diesel power but standard heavyweight equipment. The train ran once a week in those days, and the 39 3/4-hour schedule was 15 1/4 hours faster than the CHIEF, until then the fastest train on the line.

The SUPER CHIEF became America's first lightweight streamlined all-Pullman train when new equipment from Budd was put into service May 18, 1937. Lavishly decorated with rare woods and rich fabrics, they may have been the most luxurious streamlined cars ever built.

Additional equipment from Pullman-Standard permitted twice-weekly running beginning February 22, 1938. Daily service began with postwar equipment on February 29, 1948.

The train was completely re-equipped by Budd, American Car & Foundry, and Pullman-Standard in 1950 and 1951. The famous Pleasure Dome/Turquoise Room cars and the 36-seat diners now in use entered the consists at that time. Consolidation with the EL CAPITAN during the off-season began in 1958 and became general practice nearly year-round in 1970. In 1964 a dozen 24-duplex roomette cars were refurbished and rebuilt into 11-double bedroom cars exclusively for the SUPER CHIEF. The train has always been superbly staffed and maintained, and the dining car menu, featuring the $7.90 Champagne Dinner, is no doubt the finest on rails in America today.

When Amtrak took over responsibility for the train last May 1, the old train numbers 17 & 18 were retained. With Amtrak's November 14 timetable publication, the new numbers 3 & 4 were adopted. In the first two precarious months of Amtrak operation, the train's income was about on a par (relatively speaking) with the SUNSET LIMITED, the least-money-losing "long haul" train. While the tri-weekly SUNSET took in 76% of its expenses, the SUPER CHIEF collected 75% (revenues were $2,395,000 against expenses of $3,181,000). The SUPER CHIEF hauled in more cash per trip than any other long-distance American train. Of course in absolute terms its losses were high--$786,000 in May and June 1971--but not as high as some other long-distance trains like the EMPIRE BUILDER and the BROADWAY LIMITED.

During the summer and other peak travel times the train habitually is sold out. Some observers of the train have wondered why Amtrak has not mounted an off-season promotional campaign for the route. They feel that such a move would pay off, especially since the train is one of the few—like the METROLINERS and TURBOS—about which Amtrak need make no apologies. Summer advertising seems nearly unneeded, since the train runs full without promotion. When you have an excellent product, people will discover it. In slow business periods, an extra bit of promotion may do the trick in keeping revenues up.

For us, the SUPER CHIEF will remain a closely-watched train—not only for its financial performance, but for the sheer beauty of the vehicle.

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by Steve Farrar

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